

Helping Students Get Ready to Learn

Promoting healthy behaviors among students is an important part of the fundamental mission of schools: to help young people acquire the knowledge and skills to become healthy and productive adults. By promoting healthy behaviors, schools can increase students' capacity to learn, reduce absences, and improve physical fitness and mental alertness.

To help schools meet this challenge, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed the *School Health Index*. This self-assessment and planning tool will enable you to:

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your school's health promotion policies and programs.
- Develop an action plan for improving student health.
- Involve teachers, parents, students, and the community in improving school policies and programs.

Focusing on Key Health Issues: Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and Tobacco-Use Prevention

The second edition of the *School Health Index* addresses three behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and illness among young people and adults in the United States:

- Physical inactivity.
- Poor eating habits.
- Tobacco use.

Future editions will also address other health issues that have a major impact on the current and future health of young people, such as:

- Behaviors that result in intentional or unintentional injury.
- Behaviors that contribute toward risk for skin cancer.
- Asthma management.
- Food safety.
- Sexual behaviors that result in HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, or unintended pregnancy.

Here Are the Facts . . .

- Regular physical activity helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles and reduce fat, but more than a third of young people in grades 9–12 do not engage in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.
- Research suggests that skipping breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance, and even moderate undernutrition can have lasting effects on cognitive development.
- Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 400,000 deaths each year. About 29% of students in grades 9-12 are current smokers. Approximately 80% of adult tobacco users initiated smoking before 18 years of age.
- The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has doubled since 1980: almost 15% are now overweight. Overweight children are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high insulin levels. They are also more likely to become overweight adults, who are at increased risk for heart disease and diabetes.

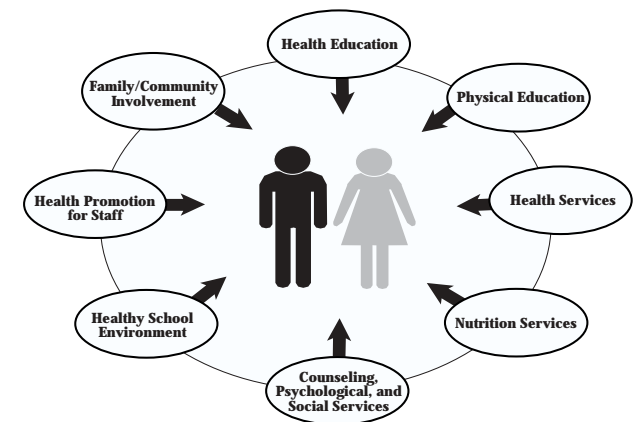
What the *School Health Index* Can Do for Your School

The *School Health Index* will provide structure and direction to your school's efforts to improve health promotion policies and programs. School administrators and staff who have used the *Index* have said:

- *"The School Health Index was easy to use and enabled us to clearly identify what is working and what needs to be improved."*
- *"It's a real energizer—it makes you think of ideas that are relatively easy to implement."*
- *"The school staff had a very positive attitude toward the Index. They liked its comprehensive view of health promotion and its involvement of many different stakeholders."*

How the *School Health Index* Works

The physical activity, eating, and tobacco-use habits of students are influenced by the entire school environment. Therefore, the *Index* has eight different modules, each corresponding to a component of a coordinated school health program:



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A team made up of members of different groups within the school—parents, teachers, students, administrators, and other staff—and concerned community members is responsible for completing a questionnaire for each module. Responses to each questionnaire are scored to help you identify your school's strengths and weaknesses. The *School Health Index* also includes a Planning for Improvement section to help your school develop an action plan for improving student health.

The *School Health Index* is available at no cost and can be completed in as little as 5 hours. Many of the improvements that you'll want to make after completing the *Index* can be done with existing staff and resources. A small investment of time can pay big dividends in improving students' well-being, readiness to learn, and prospects for a healthy life.

To obtain a copy of the *School Health Index*, choose one of the following options:

- Download from the CDC Web site:
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHI/>
- Request by E-mail: healthyyouth@cdc.gov
- Request by phone: 888-231-6405
- Request by fax: 888-282-7681

When ordering, please specify either the elementary school version or the middle school/high school version.

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HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
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School Health Index

FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, HEALTHY EATING,
AND A TOBACCO-FREE LIFESTYLE



A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide



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